

Wind power unpopular in Utah

By Edwin R. Stafford, Christine Watson, and Cathy L. Hartman

Walter Cronkite has changed his mind. After opposing a proposed wind farm off the coast of Cape Cod, Mass., in highly-publicized radio and television ads, Mr. Cronkite has withdrawn from the campaign. Initially, Mr. Cronkite declared that he supported wind energy in principle, but questioned having 130 offshore wind turbines near his vacation home community. His opposition sparked nationwide accusations of "not in my backyard" hypocrisy.

Ultimately, he reconsidered, setting a good example for a nation facing rising natural gas, oil and electricity prices. Shouldn't Utah follow his lead? Last January, NIMBY erupted in Utah County over a permit for an anemometer, a wind-speed measuring device, which would lead to a 30-turbine wind farm on Traverse Mountain, near Lehi. Developers objected to the "unsightly" device.

What, however, is more of an eyesore — another giant housing complex over looking the valley or some turbines that may be barely visible from below? Before Utahns take on NIMBY attitudes, they should consider wind energy's opportunities.

The Cape Cod project, if approved, will bring the region \$700 million of investment to build, and it will supply about 75 percent of Cape Cod's electricity without emitting any haze, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide or mercury. If only Utah could be so lucky! Because wind power costs are derived largely from the upfront construction

costs of wind farms and don't rely on price-volatile natural gas or oil, wind electricity prices are stable and predictable. Thus, harvesting Utah's wind can provide jobs, cleaner air and price-stable power for years to come. Who wouldn't want these opportunities in his or her backyard?

Contrary to popular belief, modern windmills kill few birds. Moreover, a recent study of more than 25,000 real-estate transactions, found no evidence of decreased property values as a result of being within view of commercial wind turbines. Opinions vary concerning windmill aesthetics.

As breezes catch their wings, wind turbines can be hypnotic. Eventually, people may no longer view windmills as "industrial complexes," but rather accept them as new aesthetic icons of the modern age — high-tech symbols of clean, inexhaustible energy that will

help America become more energy independent.

Thousands of Utahns have elected to buy increasing amounts of wind power via Utah Power's "Blue Sky" program. Unfortunately, Utah has no wind farms and no current plans for construction. Thus, Utah is failing to harvest its wind despite growing local

demand. Wyoming, Texas and other

states are encouraging development to help diversify electricity resources and stabilize prices. If NIMBY prevails, however, Utah could miss out on the opportunities of America's fastest growing energy source.

— Edwin R. Stafford and Cathy L. Hartman teach marketing at Utah State University. Christine Watson is an energy engineer at the Utah Energy Office.

